

**Evergreen Fire District
Board of Trustees
Meeting**

**Meeting Minutes
Regular Board Meeting of March 13th, 2023 – 6:00 pm**

CALL MEETING TO ORDER:

Board Chairman Fallon calls meeting to order @ 6:27pm

TRUSTEES IN ATTENDANCE:

Chairman Fallon, Vice Chair Connolly, Trustees Gipe and Fontaine
1 Vacancy

PERSONNEL IN ATTENDANCE:

Fire Chief Williams, Admin Cheri

RECOGNIZE PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE:

(none)

PUBLIC COMMENT: *At this time, public may comment on any public matter that is not on the Agenda of the Meeting and that is within the jurisdiction of the District.*

(none)

FINANCIALS:

Discuss and approve January 2023 Financials – Action

Fallon states his only concern is with a \$319,000 balance in 7204 at the end of February with March and April still to go and is counting on Pintler revenue to offset.

Motion; Connolly to approve the checks written and accept the January financials as presented; second by Fontaine; motion passes.

PAST ITEMS/UPDATES:

1. Approve meeting minutes of February 6th 2023 – Action

Motion; Fontaine to approve the meeting minutes of February 6th, 2023 as presented; second by Connolly; motion passes.

2. Transfer of funds to Department Fund 4212 Discussion (cont'd) – Action

Motion; Fontaine to approve the transfer not to exceed \$15,000 from Fall of 2022 wildland revenue to 4212 with remaining balance going to 7250 and less purchase of radios; second by Gipe; motion passes.

3. MSF Dividend Account Update – Fallon to talk with Amy at County(cont'd) – Action

Fallon states the County won't allow the District to set up another account but Amy suggests setting up an account in QuickBooks. Fontaine doesn't agree with setting the account up in QB only and prefers to set it up with Glacier Bank because the funds 'get lost too easily' and will be named 'Work Comp Refund'. Fallon states a new account will require the signatories on the account will be the following; 1) Fire Chief Craig Williams 2) Vice Chairman Marc Connolly 3) Trustee Bruce Gipe 4) Trustee Carol Fontaine and 5) Chairman John T Fallon (Jack). There will be the addition of another trustee when the vacancy is filled. Admin Cheri asks when the vacancy will be filled. Fallon checks the County Election website and does not see Evergreen listed. Fallon has just emailed them.

Motion; Connolly to approve a new Glacier Bank account for Work Comp Refund; second by Gipe; motion passes.

4. Health Benefits Discussion (cont'd) – Action

Fallon states for January, February and part of March there was 1 employee who had their premiums change (increased dramatically) due to participation changes and has encountered about \$500 worth of unanticipated expenses. Fallon asks the trustees if this is a resolvable issue for the employee. He asks if the insurance rep was consulted and if yes, did he fail in his advice. Admin Cheri states the rep did not advise the employee. Fallon states January premium schedule changed when the additional people were added and then dropped and states the employee and her partner (also an employee) should have enrolled separately. Connolly states that going forward; the District insurance rep going needs to advise personnel on a one on one basis instead of the group meetings that he has scheduled in the past. Fallon states the monthly amount would be 174.36 and for 3 months is 523.08. Trustees decided to rename the “Worker’s Comp Refund Account” to “Insurance Refund Account”. Chief Williams asks if there is a direction the Board is leaning in regard to benefits; termination of HRA, retirement etc. Fallon states it would be a question of when would one be stopped and when would the others become enhanced and that it would typically change at the beginning of the fiscal year. Trustees agree with Fallon’s statement. Fallon asks if Chief Williams would like him to address employees at the next Thursday meeting. Chief Williams stresses the need for ample notice to employees for any significant changes and the need to really consider the ‘fall-out’ if HRA is discontinued due to approximately 85% of personnel receiving it. Connolly states he will prepare a survey to look at an analysis of choices personnel would make if given options (without dollar amounts because they are not available) and make it available by Friday. Chief Williams states there are parameter variables that can be changed in regard to the HRA. Fallon states when the HRA started in 2019 it was understood that the \$500 (at the time) was money spent by the District and belongs to the HRA participant(s) even if the District has the right to retain it.

Motion; Connolly to approve a one-time reimbursement to “employee K” of \$523.08 for premiums for months of January, February and March health insurance increase that was incurred and will be funded from prior year health insurance refund to be paid through payroll; second by Gipe; motion passes.

5. Cheri’s Raise – Action

Fallon states this item does not require board action due to approval amounts being in the budget which usually addresses (with discretion) employee reviews. Cheri’s bookkeeping position has been reviewed by Chief Williams, Trustee Fontaine (retired CPA) and Ashley (prior EFD bookkeeper) with a commensurate wage being discussed and agreed upon. Fontaine states because this is personal information she doesn’t feel it should be part of the open meeting minutes. Trustees agree to continue the discussion in closed session.

NEW ITEMS:

1. Transfer \$25,000 from 7207 to 7250 – Action

Chief Williams states there may be more interest from personnel in regard to maintaining hydrants and would like to go ahead with the transfer but earmark some of the funds for wages. Fallon states there are funds enough to cover 3 new hydrants. Chief Williams states 2 locations have been identified and another will be prior to June 30th.

Motion; Fontaine to transfer \$25,000 from 7207 to 7250 (CIP); second by Gipe; motion passes.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

*(7:35pm - Fontaine requests the Board go into executive session for performance review of admin assistant’s additional responsibilities; there are no objections to closing the meeting)
(Meeting opens again at 7:56 pm – no action taken)*

2. Employee Workplace Environment Evaluation Study – Action

Fallon states he has not spoken with Chief Williams prior to the meeting regarding letters he

received from employees in January which he has shared with the other trustees. The end result is to address what kind of training is needed for the department; which Chief Williams has, in the past, stated is needed to improve the culture/environment. Chief Williams states he did receive an email outlining the plan but has multiple concerns with the timing and origin of the letters due to a recent termination of an employee and is concerned about the motivations of the letter writers. Fontaine states she doesn't get the sense that the evaluation is negatively motivated. Chief Williams states he just wants to make sure the evaluation process is fair, equitable and does not become something that it shouldn't. Fallon states that he and the trustees desire the same and that the eval is meant to be constructive; not destructive. Fontaine expressly agrees with Fallon. Fontaine states it's meant to find facts; Chief Williams states he also wants facts. Fontaine states that she believes that is what the evaluation is designed to do. Chief Williams states employees who have a complaint(s) have a very clear policy and procedure to follow and are obligated to follow it but feels the policy and procedure have been bypassed by the Board. Fontaine states that she doesn't feel current policy would work to address the concerns in the letters. Fallon agrees that the timing is awkward but assures Chief Williams that a perception of a "smear campaign" will not happen at the Board level. Chief Williams states that the draft questions leave room for doubt in regard to it not being a "smear campaign" and takes issue with 3 questions he feels are inflammatory. Fallon states he can reword those draft questions and submit them to the consultant. Fontaine states that the recent termination is not the sole focus of the evaluation. Chief Williams states that if any specific names were given in the letters, particular any officers; the policy is that the letter should be presented to the officer involved in the complaint in order to facilitate a conversation that can help to mitigate the issue. Chief Williams reminds the Board of the importance of following the chain of command within the department. He states that if a letter is about him; he should be able to review the letter and be given the opportunity to address it with the employee. If that person feels it has not been adequately addressed the employee then takes the complaint to the Board.

Fallon states the letters are confidential and that the purpose of the study is to ask the questions that Chief Williams reviewed and come up with recommendations for changes that need to be made to improve the atmosphere of the department in regard to relationship issues; how personnel talk to or behave around each other. Chief Williams states he is in full support of that type of evaluation and has repeatedly states to each trustee the need for the changes. He reiterates his argument is the timing and intentional orchestration of the letters Fallon received and not bypassing policy/procedure and the chain of command. He shows the trustees a flyer that is attached to every door in the fire station which provides a QR code for employees to anonymously submit any complaint, recommendation etc. He states there is a box which also allows employees to anonymously submit complaints etc. Chief Williams states he is the only person with the link to the QR code and the only person with the key to the box. He states for the past 2 years all officer evaluations including his own can be submitted anonymously. Fontaine states the Board is trying to find out why all of the provided methods aren't working. Chief Williams states it's hard to provide closure for personnel who do have legitimate concerns or complaints because he cannot share what the end results are. He tells the Board he would welcome any training on handling the issues that come with anonymous complaints and not being able to follow up. Fallon states that there is an obvious need for an HR person (maybe via contract) to take on those responsibilities. Chief Williams states that particular need is immense and that he has been saying so for quite a while. Fallon states it could be a recommendation that comes from the eval. Chief Williams states he hopes that it is but is wondering where the funding of those services will come from if recommended. Chief Williams asks Vice Chair Connolly is any of the trustees have considered a conflict of interest due to the consultant being his brother. Connolly states there has not been any concern of it being a conflict of interest. Connolly tells Chief Williams that while the letters included mention of the recent termination of a particular employee there were several 'far reaching' items that need to be addressed and have nothing to do

with the termination. Chief Williams states he feels that it isn't necessary to mention the complaints in the invitations that will be sent out to interview and would be better stated as "the Chief, in conjunction with the Board, has commissioned a study". Gipe states he had just recently learned about the study and believes the letters are powerful and need to be acknowledged while knowing there is always another side of the story in every complaint or letter received. Gipe expresses that he is impressed with the consultant's credentials and acknowledges the cost being well below what it would normally be for someone with the consultant's 'fortune 500' background. He also acknowledges the consultant will have the vested interest of 'getting it right' because of his relationship with Trustee Connolly. Gipe and Fontaine state that they did not get the impression that the evaluation is playing into a 'smear campaign' and acknowledges that Chief Williams has repeatedly stated his supports the evaluation. Chief Williams states the he is protective of his officers and that if the complaints are directed at individuals he has made sure that both parties come together and have a mutual understanding of each other and if the meeting is not successful, it goes up the chain of command. He states if the complaints are in regard to him-self, he has not been given the ability to address the complaint or the complainant. Fallon readdresses Chief Williams concern of the invitation letters stating the board received letters and tells him the invitation letter that mentions anything about 'letters' is the one being sent to those who wrote the letters and those who didn't write a letter are receiving an invitational email that does not make mention of the letter received. Chief Williams states he is fine with that because it acknowledges their letter. Chief Williams does provide clarification to Connolly in regard to the term 'administration' used in the participant questions. He states Administration is solely himself as 'administrator' and wants the consultant to understand the separation of direct supervisors vs. admin. If a study participant has an issue with the direct supervisors, it is not an issue with 'administration'; it would pertain to an officer. Fallon states administration would also consist of Fire Marshal Covington and the administrative assistant. Fontaine suggests making it clear on paper who is included in 'administration'. Chief Williams states he feels one of the questions is exceptionally leading and Fallon states the question is not directly related to the department and is included specifically because of what he has seen in other organizations. Chief Williams states the question 'Did you report all concerns' is an important one as well as a question regarding 'wage and benefit' satisfaction. Chief Williams reiterates to the Board that he supports the evaluation as long as it proves to not be a smear campaign brought about by the questionable timing of orchestrated letters. Trustee Connolly asks Admin. Assist. to compile a list of emails and phone numbers of the participants (employees over the past 6 months who left EFD but stayed in fire/EMS services).

Motion; Connolly to contract with Paul Connolly, a third party Human Resource Expert whose Practice in MN, to complete a confidential review of the feedback provided, assess the current workplace environment through extensive confidential interviews with current and prior employees and provide recommendations to the Board on changes that should be made to ensure a positive work environment for the Employees of EFD, with potential changes to the Employee Handbook on acceptable Workplace Policies and Practices. This Assessment is to be completed before April 24, 2023, with recommendations presented to the Board by that date. The cost to be approved without additional Board approval is \$5000 which will be paid out of the "Legal Services" category in 7204; second by Gipe; motion passes.

CHIEF'S REPORT:

1. January 2023 Call Volume

a) 2022/23 Comparison Incident Count by Weekday/Hour (all zones)

b) 2022/23 Comparison Incident Statistics

Chief Williams acknowledges that the statistics used have gone back to the normal 'year vs. prior year comparisons. January 2023 shows 36 fire calls vs. 32 in 2022. There were 95 EMS calls vs. 117 in January of 2022. IFT's show 68 for Jan 2023 vs. 128 in 2022. He states EFD has assisted Kalispell only

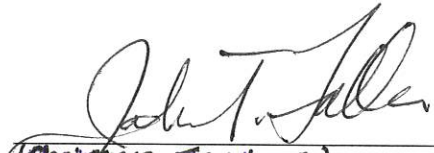
11 times this year compared to 32 times in 2022. Kalispell has added 8 additional staff and not need our mutual as much. EFD went into West Valley once in January 2022 vs. 18 in 2023. Creston mutual aid has been 11 calls this year vs. 19 in 2022. Chief Williams acknowledges the dip in EMS call volume and increase in the fire call volume and expects an uptick in inter-facility transports for February and March and could possibly have more IFT's than 911's for March. Logan is getting ready to take over the Eureka clinic as well as 911 service for Libby which will likely result in more IFT's for the District. He states it sounds like there will be a transition between Logan and Billings and intends to remain steadfast in the contract. The Medicare/Medicaid study starts in April and will require submitting data for 1 year to both entities on run volume and breaking out the cost of doing business; cost of transports vs. payroll vs. medical supplies. He states there may be a slight cost increase with Pintler because the data will be derived from them. Fallon asks if it is calendar or fiscal year reporting and Chief Williams states he chose to do fiscal year because he didn't have the data in January. The study reporting will start July 1st 2023 and run through June 30 2024. Chief Williams reports there are 9 new cadets halfway through academy. He reports that he intends to terminate the services of the clinical counselor the District had retained a couple of years ago but will maintain services with Chris as well as another Braveheart chaplain in training. Chief Williams states everything is going forward with the new truck and that he does have a committee established and will be going out to bid with vendors with the intention of keeping it local due to maintenance and repairs costs when having to ship or travel out of state. Fallon asks if the timetable of getting the engine has changed and Chief Williams states it's still 2 years out and even approaching 3 unless an alternate is found (demo with low miles). Chief Williams states that the costs have increased 35% across the board for most things with 2 primary engines going into the apparatus historically used by the District that have pretty serious re-calls currently. He states he is looking at a power train engine issue and making sure that it's compliant with what will be spec'd. Detroit Diesel has had recalls as has International. Fortunately the District is not part of the re-calls; most problems are with the newer apparatus with Chinese steel which voids the warranties.

Fallon inquires about a new ambulance and Chief Williams states a dodge chassis was spec'd and due to demand of the consumer grade Dodge pulled out of providing chassis so now he is back to looking at an F450 and still looking at an August delivery date. It was spec'd to be red but most likely won't be red but can be wrapped. Fallon states he may have to contact Inter Cap and state the need for the ambulance loan may be August or September and the need for the engine loan will be 1 to 2 years out. Chief Williams states it's typically ½ down and the rest upon delivery. Payment for ambulance won't be anything until delivered and spec'd. Fallon states the set asides will provide nearly half down for the engine and the ambulance will have \$50,000 to \$100,000 to put down and borrow estimated \$100,000.

Chief Williams reiterated the 35% increase with apparatus and is concerned about the overall cost increase. Chief Williams acknowledges the draft of the new chart of accounts which Trustee Fontaine made and thanks her for greatly simplifying it.

Adjourn @ 9:08 pm

The President of the Board of Trustees, as presiding officer of any meeting of the Board of Trustees, may close the meeting during the time the discussion relates to a matter of individual privacy; and, then, if, and only if, the presiding officer determines that the demands of individual privacy clearly exceed the merits of public disclosure. The right of individual privacy may be waived by the individual about whom the discussion pertains; and, in that event, the meeting must be open.


(Chairman Fallon)


(Vice Chair Connolly)